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ABSTRACT

According to a brief profile, after initial difficulties a student teacher learned to grasp the fundamental techniques of classroom management and received a favorable final rating from both her university supervisor and her cooperating teacher. However, even with the encouragement and endorsement of her supervisors, she decided not to go into teaching. Even though her teachers believed that they had helped the student teacher to improve significantly, nevertheless, they had a nagging suspicion that, somehow, they had failed. (JD)

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PASSING, BUT FAILING: A STUDENT TEACHER CHOOSES NOT TO TEACH

Paper presented at the Association for Teacher Education National Convention

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What about the student teacher who passes student teaching, but declares, "I know I never want to teach!" Is this a failure on the part of the university supervisor, the cooperating teacher or the student teacher? Could it be survival of the fittest, self-selection, or some other reason?

Liz, a high school foreign language student teacher did, in fact, decide against teaching even though both the university supervisor and the public school cooperating teacher had given her a favorable final rating.

The setting for Liz's sixteen week student teaching experience was a moderate size high school in Hamilton County near the city of Cincinnati, Ohio. Students are from predominantly lower to upper middle class families. Only five percent of the student population is black and of the 95% white students almost a third are Appalachian.

Liz began her student teaching assignment with only one section but gradually assumed more responsibility until she taught five sections during her last four weeks.

From the very beginning she had trouble with discipline. When students talked while she was teaching, she would try to talk over them by talking louder. When this did not work she would keep hissing "sh!" During one class she used this type of desist thirty-five times in a fifty-five minute period. She seemed hesitant to rebuke students by name, so they assumed she couldn't figure out who the culprits were.

Despite the initial supervisory advice to list her rules and expectations for students, she kept putting this off, hoping students would learn to govern themselves when they learned to like her. By

the time she finally listed her rules, three weeks had passed and students had developed bad habits that would persist for another three or four weeks.

When calling on a student, Liz would focus her gaze on that student and not even look at the other students. Students soon learned that they could take advantage of this. She was advised by the supervisor to scan the room while listening to a student, but she was worried that the responding student would think her rude.

Another problem that exacerbated her discipline dilemma was under-preparation. When she started "running out of gas", the students would get her off on a tangent and a "bull session" would result. Both the cooperating teacher and university supervisor advised her to plan more than she could accomplish.

She was also advised to start class on time and to make transitions between activities swift and efficient. When she was underprepared she allowed her transitions to take as long as two or three minutes. This resulted in students' communicating in a disruptive manner. She was advised to keep transitions under a half-minute.

Two other problems necessitating supervisory help were her calling on students who shouted out but didn't raise their hands, and calling on only one side of the class.

Liz was videotaped four times during her student teaching and her last two tapes showed remarkable progress. She learned, with supervisory help, to stop rewarding misbehaving students with attention and began to reinforce the students who were cooperating and attending. She stopped her practice of calling on students who

shouted out without raising their hands. She learned to eye-scan, to change the seating, and to involve all students in class discussion. She learned to plan enough for the entire period, to start class on time, to convey a session of urgency, and to close on time with goals met and assignments made. She learned to make transitions brief and orderly and to keep students on track.

Why, with all Liz learned, did she still decide to leave teaching? Why was there no happy ending to go with all her progress?

Part of the answer could relate to Liz's personality and her disillusionment with students' lack of intrinsic motivation. Another part could relate to Liz's dire need for approval and love from her students. In the closing interview with her university supervisor she said, "I want to teach. Why won't they let me? I don't like teaching or myself when I have to force them. They don't like me when I do that. I want them to like me. I want them to want to learn!"

Before starting student teaching Liz was exposed to classroom management techniques in her methods classes and in her field observation and participation. At the start of student teaching she attended a large group session on classroom management. In addition, while student teaching she attended weekly seminars with her university supervisor and other student teachers. She received sympathetic support and advice during these seminars and observed video tapes of other student teachers. She also shared her tapes. Even though everyone was impressed with her progress, she continued to express doubts as to whether she should be a teacher.

We educators talk so much about our successes, but maybe we also need to talk about our failures. Even though we believe we helped Liz to improve significantly, the fact is that she chose not to teach. And the nagging suspicion remains that, somehow, somewhere, we failed.

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